



Youth in the Great Outdoors

Profile of STEP student Mara Healy

A Day in the Life

College Sophomore Mara Healy had little idea that by the end of Summer 2011, she'd teach fish dissection to summer campers, identify native Western Pearlshell freshwater mussels using an aquascope, or help install a fish weir as part of Elwha Dam removal, one of the largest dam removal projects in U.S. history.

A student at Western Washington University, Mara joined two other college students as Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) Fisheries Technicians hired for two months in Summer 2011 by the Service's Western Washington Fishery Resource Office (WWFRO).

Creating Conservation Professionals

The Service hires young adults aged 15-25 in temporary positions as part of the agency's Connecting People With Nature Program. Since 2009 the Pacific Region Fishery Resources program has more than doubled the number of temporary youth hires in response to a challenge by Interior Secretary Ken Salazar to engage, educate, and employ the next generation of conservation professionals as part of the Department of the Interior's Youth and the Great Outdoors Initiative.

Healy and STEP students Claire Wood and Tree Steel split their summer work into two key areas: helping biologist Dan Spencer and other staff deliver the WWFRO's innovative Youth Fisheries Academy program, and conducting hands-on field research that benefits Service aquatic conservation programs. "Americans are spending less time outdoors," says Academy leader Dan Spencer. "Mara and other students like her are making a difference by connecting our youth with the natural world."



STEP Student Mara Healey (Credit: USFWS)

Bringing Academics to the Field

Healy currently studies at the University's Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies, where she's worked with biologists and ecologists to design and implement field-based projects as part of her academic program. A self-described rock climber, hiker, and knitting enthusiast who loves to 'be on the water,' Healy got plenty of opportunities as a Service employee to do just that and further 'transform [her] aesthetically-based interest in the natural world into a scientifically-based interest.'

Career Pathways

The Pacific Region Fishery Resources program is proud to provide pathways to explore natural resources careers for promising young adults and aspiring conservationists like Mara Healy. Healy's summer blog of her experience sums up the goals of our youth hire program nicely, "Whatever path I choose to meander down in the future, I know that the experience this STEP position has given me will be extremely valuable and useful in continuing to explore my educational interests and career opportunities!"



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http://www.fws.gov/wafwo/wwfish_new.html